

September 24, 1967

Silent Lie Detector CIA in Market For 'Wiggle Seat' Chairs

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Chicago Daily News Service

Washington — The "wiggle seat," which must rank as one of the most unusual and expensive chairs in the history of furniture, is being developed under the direction of the Central Intelligence Agency.

This electronic device looks like an ordinary office chair. But the unwary person who innocently takes a seat and begins to answer questions may then be subjected, without his knowledge, to a lie-detector examination.

The project, in which both the CIA and the equally sensitive National Security Agency have shown intense interest, is officially secret. A CIA spokesman, when asked about it, declined to comment.

Pushing for Device

But several sources have confirmed that the CIA, through contracts channeled to private industry through the Defense Department, is pushing development of the device.

The matter squirmed into public view as the Senate was debating Sen. Sam J. Ervin's "bill of rights" for government employees. The bill, which passed the Senate 79 to 4, sharply limits the use of lie-detector, or polygraph, tests by government agencies, including CIA and NSA.

Ervin, D-N.C., who is scornful of polygraph tests and refers to them a 20th century witchcraft, told the Senate that the CIA was developing "a lie-detecting machine by means of which a person can be tested without his knowledge."

In an exchange with Sen. Ralph Yarborough, D-Texas, Ervin quipped, "If the senator has any contact with the CIA, he had better be careful of where he sits. . . it grieves me to think that the security of the United States is in the hands of men who place their faith in

the polygraph machine and the 'wiggle seat'."

CIA interest in such a device goes back at least five years, according to reliable sources.

It could not be learned whether the "wiggle seat" has been put to work by the nation's intelligence agencies.

Philco Product

But a number of private companies, who hold research and development contracts from the Defense Department, are known to be working on aspects of the problem.

The Philco-Ford Corp. has just put on the market a device called MediScreen which comes close to fitting Ervin's definition of a "wiggle seat."

The new Philco product, developed under contracts with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Air Force, looks like an ordinary cushioned office chair—with one exception. An instrument box protrudes from the chair's back.

And the person being tested must keep his hands in contact with metal plates on the arms of the chair.

This device, which costs \$5250, is offered by Philco for a variety of medical diagnostic tests that might be performed in a hospital, clinic or private doctor's office.

No Straps

But a Philco brochure, which mentions the lie-detector application only in passing, does emphasize: "Nothing intrudes on the serenity of the setting. The patient does not see, much less wear, an electrode — straps and wires are prominent only by their absence."

D. Scott Hindley, Philco's director of market planning in Washington, confirmed that the company is exploring ways to adapt the MediScreen device so the unknowing subject of a polygraph test would think he was sitting in an ordinary chair.



SEN. SAM J. ERVIN

"It Grieves Me . . ."

Another company interested in what Sen. Ervin called the "wiggle seat" is Space/Defense Corp. of Birmingham, Mich.

Malcolm Ross, the firm's president, said the company had developed a workable polygraph chair.